The embodiments of the invention in which an exclusive property or privilege is claimed are defined as follows:

1.   A programming interface layer for an integrated address book clearinghouse that receives programming interface function calls for the integrated address book clearinghouse, the programming interface layer including address book management functions usable by any of a plurality of applications to manage the integrated address book clearinghouse, the programming interface layer comprising:

a plurality of executable address book management functions;

a parameter processing module for processing function-specific parameters, including identity information for an address book, for one of said plurality of address book management functions, wherein said function-specific parameters are encapsulated in a function call data envelope identified as associated with said one of said address book management functions; and

a response generating module for generating a function-specific response from a said one of sail plurality of address book management functions, wherein said function-specific response is encapsulated in a response data envelope identified as associated with said one of said address book management functions and includes said identity information.

2.   The programming interface of Claim 1, further comprising an identity verification module for verifying said identify information and any authentication information for said identity information prior to executing any of said address book management functions.

3.   The programming interface of Claim 1, wherein said one of said address book management function operates on a contact within an address book, corresponding to said identity information, in said address book management system.

4.   The programming interface of Claim 1, wherein said one of said address book management function operates on a group of contacts within an address book, corresponding to said identity information, in said address book management system. .

5.   The programming interface of Claim 1, wherein said one of said address book management function operates on a permission setting for an owner of an address book, corresponding to said identity information, in said address book management system.

6.   The programming interface of Claim 1, wherein said identity information is verified by an authentication server in said address book management system.

7.   The programming interface of Claim 1, wherein said identity information is verified by a partner server in communication with said address book management system.

8.   A computer readable media containing computer executable instructions for performing the actions of the programming interface layer of any of Claims 1-7.

9.   A computer system having a processor and a memory storing computer executable instructions operative to perform the actions of the programming interface layer of any of Claims 1-7.

10.   A computer implemented method for accessing an integrated address book clearinghouse via a programming interface layer, the method comprising:

encapsulating in a function call data envelope a function-specific parameter identified as associated with an address book management function and identity information;

generating a programming interface function call directed to said address book management function, wherein said programming interface function call includes said function call data envelope; and

receiving a programming interface response from said address book management function, wherein said programming interface response is encapsulated in a response data envelope and identifies said address book management function and said identity information.

11.   The method of Claim 10, wherein said address book management function operates on an address book, corresponding to said identity information, in said address book management system.

12. The method of Claim 10, wherein said address book management function operates on a contact within an address book, corresponding to said identity information, in said address book management system.

13. The method of Claim 10, wherein said address book management function operates on a group of contacts within an address book, corresponding to said identity information, in said address book management system.

14. The method of Claim 10, further comprising obtaining authentication information for said identity information.

15. The method of Claim 14, further comprising sending said identity information and said authentication information to a partner computing system accessible by the integrated address book clearinghouse system.

16. The method of Claim 14, further comprising encapsulating said identity information and authentication information in said function call data envelope.

17. The method of Claim 15, wherein said authentication information is obtained from a remote authentication service.

18. A computer readable media containing computer executable instructions for performing the method of any of Claims 10-17.

19. A computer system having a processor and a memory storing computer executable instructions operative to perform the method of any of Claims 10-17.